

## Rep. Nick Rahall's Extension of Remarks on the President's Surge and Accelerate Policy

Madame Speaker,

President Bush's war in Iraq has now gone longer than America's involvement in World War II. Now we learn President Bush intends to escalate the number of American troops in Iraq. The great question across the land today is: is more of the same the answer? Will more of the same stabilize Iraq, or for that matter the Middle East?

In all this long war in Iraq, we cannot help but wonder, what if?

What if we had not gone to war?

What if we had listened to that very important and vocal minority who stood against the war when the President led us down that misbegotten road? Oh yes, I agree we are where we are today and we need to get out of this mess together. I have been patient since my no vote on this war four years ago and my yes vote almost 17 years ago for the first Gulf War.

Of course, there are others who are also asking what if. They are the family and friends of the young men and women who served their country. They are the loved ones of those who have not been lucky enough to make it home. They are those who sacrificed marriage, children, jobs, all in the name of a war many now casually say was a mistake.

They are those, like my son-in-law, who sacrificed seeing the birth of his and my daughter's first child.

These moments are painful for families across the country as we recently celebrated the holiday season. These moments make us want to dwell in the hope of the question, what if?

But we must not dwell, because in reflection we sometimes miss opportunity. The President is set to announce that he wants to see a "surge" force of approximately 20,000 extra soldiers to support the ongoing civil war in Iraq.

Madame Speaker, it does not take a rocket scientist to calculate the odds that more troops will mean more wounded,

more fatalities, more losses to American families. Is the President ready for 20,000 more grieving families? Worse yet, has the President considered what this will do to the existing all volunteer force?

Retired Army Colonel Douglas McGregor has been quoted as saying, "It will break the force, which in my estimation is broken already. It will leave you with no strategic reserves." Retired Army Colonel David Hunt has said, "Everyone we met was on a second tour, at least, and many were on their fourth or fifth combat tour in either Iraq or Afghanistan. The soldiers are tired; the families are going nuts. It's not the solution."

But then, Madame Speaker, the President has not shown that this is truly about the sacrifice of our men and women. If it were, all of the options presented to the President would be open for consideration, not just the ones that already fit into his ideological philosophy. The report from the Iraq Study Group would not have been as casually tossed aside as were the advisements of the Presidents own military leaders...career servicemen and women who have given their entire professional lives to protecting America.

Over 3,000 have already lost their lives, and that's only the Americans. One journalist in particular, is asking what if on his own. Keith Olbermann, host of Countdown with Keith Olbermann has asked:

"What if he had already sacrificed 3,003 of them - and was then to announce his intention to sacrifice hundreds, maybe thousands, more?

"This is where we stand tonight with the BBC report of President Bush's "new Iraq strategy," and his impending speech to the nation, which, according to a quoted senior American official, will be about troop increases and "sacrifice."

"The president has delayed, dawdled and deferred for the month since the release of the Iraq Study Group.

"He has seemingly heard out everybody, and listened to none of them.

"If the BBC is right - and we can only pray it is not - he has settled on the only solution all the true experts agree cannot possibly work: more American personnel in Iraq, not as trainers for Iraqi troops, but as part of some flabby plan for "sacrifice." (Countdown, MSNBC, 1/2/07)

Madame Speaker, the Presidents proposal reminds me of the ostrich who would rather stick his head in the sand, than face the reality that Americans want our soldiers home now. Not after another 20,000 have had to die for a strategy that is entirely wrong.

In Olbermann's words, "The additional men and women you have sentenced to go there, sir, will serve only as targets." Which, is exactly what they will be - bodies to absorb the surge in the number of insurgents which this senseless war has created. This senseless, endless war, as Mr. Olbermann states has succeeded in two ways:

"It has succeeded, Mr. Bush, in enabling you to deaden the collective mind of this country to the pointlessness of endless war, against the wrong people, in the wrong place, at the wrong time.

It has gotten many of us used to the idea - the virtual "white noise" - of conflict far away, of the deaths of young Americans, of vague "sacrifice" for some fluid cause, too complicated to be interpreted except in terms of the very important-sounding but ultimately meaningless phrase "the war on terror."

And the war's second accomplishment - your second accomplishment, sir - is to have taken money out of the pockets of every American, even out of the pockets of the dead soldiers on the battlefield, and their families, and to have given that money to the war profiteers." (Countdown, MSNBC, 1/2/07)

Which, Madame Speaker, brings me back to the question of what if? In light of all of the evidence to the contrary, what if we, as Congress, allow the President to send tens of thousands of more men and women to keep a peace that does not exist?

Madame Speaker, it is my hope that four years from now, I will not have to look back on this question of what if with the same heavy heart that I do for the past four years.

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In the House of Representatives

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